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ABSTRACT

The design of retention programs at colleges and universities should focus on closing the gap between the involvement of a few participants and the total academic community. Library programs and services can provide a diverse and personalized approach to meeting differences in information processing capabilities and ability levels of students. Active information network teams comprised of librarians, faculty and administrators have a responsibility to plan and organize quality programs and services and to develop a climate conducive to retaining black students. A thorough understanding of the information-seeking behavior of students is essential to the success of any retention program. Contains 18 references. (KM)

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THE ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND FACULTY IN THE RETENTION OF BLACK STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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The design of retention programs at colleges and universities across the country should focus on closing the gap between the involvement of a select few of participants and the total academic community. Active information network teams comprised of librarians, faculty, and administrators have a responsibility to plan, organize, and develop a climate conducive to retaining students. A thorough understanding of the information-seeking behavior of students is essential to the success of any retention program.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, Black students in higher education are part of the information technology age and will be the future leaders. The impact of this age focuses on the way students think and learn in an information oriented society. As students today and leaders tomorrow, their success depends on how they use information to prepare themselves academically and to function in society -- how to be independent, well-rounded, self-directed, and lifelong learners. Without the skills necessary to access, retrieve, and comprehend information, students cannot perform successfully in a society that is highly competitive and information oriented.

We have always known that information existed, but are we aware of the voluminous amount that is available in various formats for learning? Technology makes information accessible from national and international networks, online bibliographic retrieval services, integrated online catalogs, compact discs, personal computers, laser discs, etc. We no longer have to rely upon manual systems to support academic, personal, or recreational information needs; whether student, faculty, staff or administrator.

With the advent of technology, the mission and role of the library should parallel that of the institution in its retention of students. The new technology and the abundance of information cannot distinguish between color or the intelligence of users. However, the programs and services offered by the library, together with the faculty, can be diverse and personalized to adapt to differences in information processing capabilities and levels.

Librarians can perform participatory and advisory roles, such as teacher, consultant, facilitator, and mediator to administrators and faculty in their

quest to design and implement strategies for developing retention programs. The effective use of information in an information oriented society is vital to the academic success of the users served. The ability of students to use, interpret, and communicate information effectively and proficiently will enhance personal growth and improve chances for greater academic attainment.

UNDERSTANDING AND PROVIDING FOR THE NEEDS OF BLACK STUDENTS

Black colleges and universities, due to their admission standards, accept students with varying levels of academic preparation for undergraduate matriculation. Many of these students are deficient in reading, writing, listening, comprehension, reasoning, study skills, setting goals and objectives, setting priorities, and budgeting their time wisely. Their academic preparation is weak, they are usually the first in their family to attend college, and their perception of what higher education means is not well defined. They have communication problems that relate to how they identify, interpret, and use information. Some may have academic potential while others will need greater academic support. Many of them will need to be nourished and cultivated and encouraged and motivated to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. These students will need personal attention and guidance not only during their freshman year but throughout their four years of college.

For many black colleges and universities this is a profile of the freshman student population on campus -- a population that has special barriers or problems and special needs. But what is being done to meet their special problems and needs, retain them, and graduate them?

The literature identified numerous programs that are used to improve retention. These include: 1) student needs assessment, 2) career counseling and academic advisement programs, 3) improved basic skills and academic

remediation programs,[1] 4) peer-mentor counseling, 5) a student-to-student improvement course in learning skills, 7) peer counseling, 8) "alert cards" for potential dropouts,[2] etc.

However, I forsee the problem in student retention programs is failure of the academic community to understand how Black culture relates to learning. Understanding the relationship between culture and learning reveals the information-seeking behavior characteristics students use to identify, interpret, evaluate, digest and use information to fulfill their needs. Anderson states,

> Two critical factors underscore the minor success of retention programs. First of all the programs themselves share the same model, one which emanates from basic educational learning theory and which reflects Anglo-European notions about cognitive functioning, learning and achievement. A second critical factor is that these programs have almost never attempted to identify the cognitive assets and learning preferences of non-white students.[3]

In view of this, have proponents of retention programs considered the effects that Black students' information-seeking behavior have on the way in which they reach academic attainment and address information needs? Have programs been designed to focus on learning as it relates to culture?

If retention programs are used over and over with minimal success, then something needs to be done differently. Change the traditional academic learning environment! Change programs so more emphasis is placed upon 1) identifying how students learn, 2) strengthening their information-seeking skills, 3) providing a nourishing environment, 4) reinforcing and frequently monitoring skills and outcomes, and 5) involving the total academic community (including librarians).

The results of a three-year study conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) including eight private liberal arts colleges in

California, "focused on the deficiencies in retention programs instead of the traditional approach of focusing on why students drop out.[4]"

Moore suggests that an "environment program" be used to produce open-admissions graduates who would become more academically competitive and less culturally deficient. The program would

> identify the principal deficiencies that students bring to college, ... identify those that are most likely to be rectifiable, then appropriate adjustment would be made in the college environment to begin the correction process. Certain academic activities would be standard throughout the campus. Choices would be based on the assumption that if teachers collaborated for four years on overcoming a particular student weakness, the students will show significant improvement in that area.[5]

Institutions of higher education must accept more responsibility and accountability when stating that they have retention programs that address student needs -- the programs must work! Programs must train, retain, and graduate students with literate and competitive skills to function in society now and for the twenty-first century.

Cerstvik, in the 1986 College Board report states,

> The best and most successful retention programs are in institutions that understand the needs of their students who are coming in and then set in place programs, services, people, and attitudes designed to increase the competency base, knowledge and skills of those students.[6]

A CAMPUS-WIDE COMMITMENT

Librarians do not always find a collegial receptiveness from faculty and administrators. There is a lack of effective communication and interaction among the academic community. Moffett summarizes this as

> ... librarians expect of their teaching and administrative colleagues (and do not invariably find) 1) a genuine understanding of the library's mission in higher education, 2) a clearer recognition of the professional librarian's

> craft and an acceptance of the librarian as a peer in the educational enterprise, and 3) a reliable flow of communication and consultation.[7]

In essence, these images have a direct bearing on how students perceive their learning environment.

A campus-wide commitment involves the need to reconstruct academic ideas and illusions concerning the library. This commitment must originate from the administration and flow to the faculty. The message must convey the need to involve the library extensively in the academic program, because its programs and services are essential to the success of instruction and the performance of students.

In the first higher education conference on academic libraries, held March 1987, including faculty, administrators, librarians, library educators, etc., Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation, lists four areas where "better connections" are needed with libraries:

- Between colleges and schools;
- Between the classroom and other resources for learning on campus;
- Between general and specialized education; and
- Between the formal and informal teachers of our culture.[8]

A campus-wide commitment must focus on directing more attention to providing for individual needs, abilities, and levels. A directive from the administration should allow information network teams to develop between librarians, faculty, and administrators. Through these teams students should be encouraged and given confidence to master and achieve academic skills. Priority should be given to preparing a caring and sensitive environment for students to learn. Such an environment lends itself to retaining students who feel less frustrated and more self-assured of their academic purpose. Programs that encourage self-assurance and self-confidence will develop active learners.

Furthermore, through an effective campus-wide program, colleges and

universities will reap the benefits of leadership programs that retain students and prepare them for successful careers. The leadership programs must generate success rather than defeat, accomplishment rather than failure, and proficiency rather than deficiency. Academic excellence requires setting goals and objectives, evaluative strategies, and forming strong working relationships with the entire academic community to produce competent outcomes in Black students.

As academic administrators and faculty sort through the future of retaining Black students in their institutions, they must realize and understand the impact of information technology. This impact will require new learning, new commitments, and new thrusts relating to all areas of the institution, not only instruction but integration of the total library into the instructional process.

THE INFORMATION NETWORK TEAMS: A MODEL TO INTEGRATE STUDENT RETENTION AND LIBRARY PROGRAMS

The literature identified numerous retention programs and strategies initiated at colleges and universities across the country. However, none addressed the total integration of library personnel or library programs and services into retention strategies. The mere mention of library skills instruction was the extent of use, but not as it relates to retention. I see this as a void in our academic structure and lack of institutional and sustained priorities.

As academic institutions focus on retention programs through curriculum innovations, librarians should be tapped not only to provide library skills instruction and resource materials, but to design a collaborative model for program study. In this model,[Insert table 1] priority should be to develop active information network teams including librarians, faculty, and

administrators. These teams "should transmit to students the value and rewards of research, in their lives as students and beyond. Information literacy should be a demonstrable outcome of undergraduate education."[9]

Through collaborative efforts, the teams should develop programs that 1) provide a smoother transition from high school to college; 2) provide an atmosphere conducive for learning; 3) meet individual needs and abilities; 4) reinforce academic deficiencies through instruction and tutorials; and 5) improve communication through information interpretation and utilization. As a result of collaborative efforts, Boyer states,

> . the model of the undergraduate experience that I would imagine for the future would be one in which students become increasingly independent, increasingly creative, and increasingly link knowledge across the disciplines. As they become advanced students, toward their senior year, they would spend less time in the classroom, more time in consulting with sources of information on campus ... the information centers would, in fact, increasingly become a kind of pinnacle teacher on campus.[10]

The information network teams should identify and seek out resources, address and review existing problems that students face and design corrective programs and services together. Both librarians and faculty address student needs on a daily basis -- they teach, train, and counsel. From interacting and observing students, librarians are aware of deficiencies in skills, such as reading, writing, mathematical problem solving, reading interpretation and comprehension, information-seeking behavior, and the high risk student or potential dropout. Librarians can also provide information on the assessment of student needs from identifying students who do and do not use information resources to what resources are used and how they are used. As this type of information is cataloged, it should be added to a profile of students' strengths and weaknesses that the institution has developed. Once this profile has been identified, the teams should design study sessions that provide

guidance and counseling in correcting problems and deficiencies. Students should be channeled into programs that address writing and reading skills, oral delivery of information, study habits, information-seeking behavior, goal-setting, time management, and self-discipline.

Second, is the need for the information network teams to plan and implement library instruction sessions attended by students throughout their four years of study. For example, Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana offers a unique library instruction program because it extends to every discipline taught in the college. In addition to using traditional methods of bibliographic instruction, the role of collection development and the use of CD-ROM technology are explored.

Third, the teams should design collaborative courses to teach resource literature with subject matter. For example, students should be required to select a contemporary societal problem and explore the issues and ethics surrounding it by integrating lecture and discussion with related bibliographic instruction. Follow-up sessions should provide students an opportunity to learn more about the topic independently from classroom instruction. This type of program was initiated at the University of Colorado College of Arts and Sciences for freshmen during 1985. Anthes states that this course

> 1) encourages and promotes student and faculty interaction in the development of bibliographic research skills centered in a specific academic discipline and 2) it promotes interaction between the librarians and teaching faculty.[11] It ... also has advantages for upper division courses.

A program such as this will assist the information network teams in identifying problems associated with information-seeking skills related to writing, reading, and oral delivery.

Fourth, students should be encouraged to develop creative and individualized research assignments. The North Texas State University offers a

biographical research assignment for journalism students that integrates library skills into the curriculum. This assignment accomplishes three goals:

1) Library skills, including an awareness of basic reference sources for biographical searching and for locating periodical articles, and knowledge of library locations and services
2) Knowledge of some of the important living journalists
3) Review of interviewing techniques and principles.[12]

Other library-curriculum related activities include for example, studying a topic from a historical perspective and performing research to identify costuming, speech patterns, modes of transportation, etc. during the period, as well as topics of personal interests and current awareness issues.

Fifth, the information network teams have a responsibility to design and provide tailored information products for library-curriculum-study sessions integration that address the individual student's learning style. These packets, to be effective, can range from general to specific focusing on groups or individuals. The medium of production may vary from paper to computer depending upon the student's abilities to use the information effectively and efficiently.

Sixth, once the retention programs are actively in place, feedback from the teams must be classified and cataloged to identify successes, problems, and failures associated with students involved. A mid-semester assessment and an end of the semester evaluation are recommended. This data should provide the quantitative and qualitative base for further research on the effectiveness of programs and services.

The overall components necessary to the success of this model include the ability of personnel to coordinate, communicate, cooperate, and collaborate program intentions with <u>all</u> facets of the academic community. Only then can program goals and objectives be achieved with administrators, faculty, and

librarians networking for the academic success of all students.

Special Needs Areas

These areas focus on another group of students who should be integrated into retention programs and services. Programs that provide linkages between elementary and secondary schools are avenues for recruiting students into higher education. These programs should solicit support and participation from librarians and faculty in the public schools and academic community. Through support programs, both groups can identify students who are weak in information-seeking skills and will need special counseling and tutorial programs to guarantee academic success in undergraduate education. On the other hand, high school students who have acquired proficient library skills can be tapped for academic library tutorial programs for other undergraduate students. The peer leadership approach can be used to improve information-seeking skills through a peers' mentor and honors program. Academic libraries can also link with public schools to provide:

> 1) high school class visits to academic libraries; 2) academic librarians working directly with high school students to provide instruction; 3) programs and priviledges for special groups, such as gifted and advanced placement students; 4) academic libraries working with school librarians at a local or state level; [and] 5) provision of materials designed to introduce high school students to the academic library.[13]

Through comprehensive pre-college experiences, the information network teams should provide academic and community support to bridge programs, summer transition programs, career projects, etc. These programs should focus on generating employment experiences for high school students who are enrolled at the institution. As a result, students are exposed to academics and employment while enhancing skills related to both environments. The assets of this

program translate into an educational pipeline between the public schools, higher education, and the community.

Orientation programs for incoming freshmen should include the library on its agenda. Students need to be made aware of support services that the library has to offer. These services will directly effect classroom and academic preparation.

Counseling activities that focus on tutorial programs and services, such as interviewing, resumé writing, careers, study sessions, etc. should also include librarians in participatory and consultant roles. Not only can library resources be provided to supplement activities, but personnel can be utilized to integrate information-seeking skills into study sessions and assist students in setting priorities, goals, and objectives.

Multiple target groups that include commuting, part time, older, non-traditional, and handicapped students should also involve librarians. An awareness of students' special needs can assist librarians in designing programs and services that address 1) the extension of library hours, 2) obtaining access to library resources, 3) more integration of library and classroom instruction, and 4) extended orientation and counseling services. Many of these students by nature of their classification may possess fewer library skills, require more individualized instruction, and have different educational and other informational needs. In essense, librarians can provide improvement in the delivery of services to users.

Retention programs that focus on peer-faculty mentor counseling should also involve librarians. They can serve as liaisons to promote greater diversity within the program and assist in developing activities that promote more campus involvement.

The Future Outlook

Not only should institutions of higher education design retention programs for now, but a profile of the future student population should also be addressed and planned for accordingly. The literature suggests the following for the future: 1) fewer undergraduates, 2) a sharp decline in full time students, 3) an increase in part time enrollment, 4) a decline in students under age 25, and 4) an increase in students age 25 and over.[14] This projected enrollment pattern will affect the entire academic community, including libraries. Therefore, it is important that the information network teams plan strategically to deal with these changes.

SUMMARY

The purpose and role of the academic library should link with that of the institution in the pursuit of performance, achievement, and retention of Black students in higher education. This linkage can be explored between elementary and secondary schools, curriculum innovations, counseling activities, multiple target groups, etc. These programs should guide students from point of contact through their four years of college.

Library programs and services can provide a diverse and personalized approach to meeting differences in information processing capabilities and ability levels of students that faculty face in the classroom. Librarians can support faculty in developing a competent and qualitative knowledge base of information for students to become independent, self-directed, and lifelong learners.

In an effort to retain Black students and attract others, librarians, administrators, and faculty must develop active information network teams that will provide quality programs and services to enhance students' learning skills

and abilities. Foremost is the necessity to understand Black culture and how it relates to the way students comprehend and use information.

A campus-wide commitment, enforced by the administration, must emphasize that the library be heavily integrated and extensively applied throughout the academic program. Information network teams must focus on designing programs tailored to meet individual needs and abilities -- essentials of effective retention strategies. Programs should encourage students and give them confidence to master and achieve academic skills. A caring attitude and a sensitive relationship with students must be in the forefront when planning and implementing programs that will generate success.

As institutions of higher education face the future, information network teams should link to promote academic excellence, desired performance outcomes, and the retention of students.

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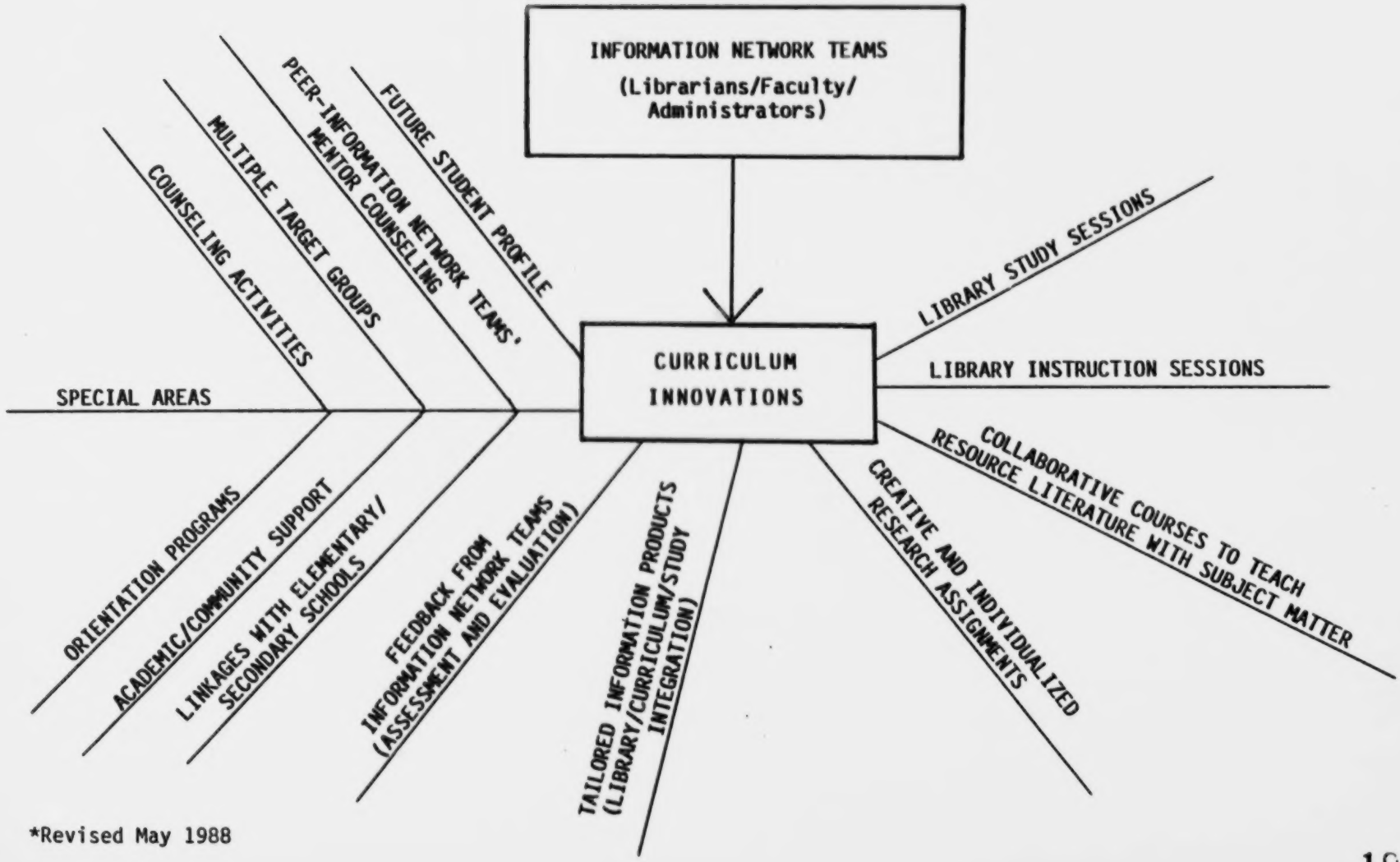
Table 1

*INFORMATION NETWORK TEAMS: A MODEL TO INTEGRATE
STUDENT RETENTION AND LIBRARY PROGRAMS



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